

## CHIPKO ANDOLAN

( A SOCIAL MOVEMENT WITH ECOLOGICAL BASE )

The society and "Nature" are interrelated to each other, with the culmination of these two the total life situation are framed. In most cases the reality is not that of homogenous integration but that of manipulative role played by human being in the pretext of dubious so called 'economic development'. This manipulative aspect or phenomenon not only affects the environment as such, in addition it also affects social life and life situations have to be adjusted in the changed atmosphere.

The 'Chipko Andoolan' or movement is the result of one of these manipulative role played by a section of society and the counter action by the other part to preserve their right. In 1972, the chipko movement took birth in a hill town, Gopeshwar in Chamoli district in Uttar Pradesh. This was initially a move to prevent the labourers of contractors who come to cut down the trees in that area. The basis of ideology was that of local resources being drained out without any profit to the inhabitants of the area. In order to desist the labourers from cutting the tree, the people decided to hug the trees (Chipko) and save the trees from the axe men.

The resistance movement has a long precedence rooted back to the British Raj. In 1920 a procession of the hill people demanding to asseret their rights started in Tonkhand in Uttar Kashi district. The prize for demanding the restoration of rights was paid with bullets & where 80 people died. Again and again there were sporadic incidents of violence by the authorities when-ever people demanded their right. The concrete action on a movement wide basis started after the post independence era during 1972 onwards which spread out like a wild fire in the forest through the hilly areas of Garhwal.

The region was ruled by a king. After independence the situation changed and it was par with other parts as it became part of U.P. The social aspect of people reveals an overwhelming influence of Hindu Pilgrimage centers being located in the area namely Badrinath Kedearnath and Gengotri & Yammunotri. Near these centers the trade and other means of communication have developed to cater the needs of pilgrims. The caste (conflict) or stratification as it exists is not so sharp as it is among the people ~~xxxxxxx~~ in plains.

Politically the region does not command any weight in state level politics. This is due to the backwardness of the area and in addition to it its incapacity to contribute towards state revenue other than the forest products. Recently the work of Tehi Dam has attracted attention of many people. Surprisingly, even though it is a strategic area from the viewpoint that all the border it has with china, it has never been given much attention as it is done in North East or Kashmir. This is relatively due to the high Himalayan mountains and also the local inhabitant who are not against the govt. as it is in North East.

Economically the whole region of Uttarkhand represents a typical hill economy primarily based on agriculture. The old people as they recall, was mainly forest based - dairying and agriculture. As the forest is cut down for state revenue the dairying is losing ground and giving its way to modern imported Milk Powder. The development of area is normally imagined with new roads and other modern facilities. However the building of roads to interior areas is antidevelopmental, as it helps to drain out local resources. One important economic factor of the area is the pattern of land holdings. It's not as uneven as it is in the plains. Everyone has some land to cultivate, but whether it is economic holdings or not is a matter to be debated. The extent of landlessness is very less. Thus with everyone possessing little land, the people are left with no other alternative but to go out for work during off seasons. All this eventually leads to a position wherein the local people either with land or landless has to search for work once the agriculture season comes to end. Everyone - male and female work on any type which is available - what we see is not only the Harijans go out. Searching for work but even the Brahmin works together. This seems to be an important distinction comparing with other areas in the country.

Money-Order Economy: The economy of the area is popularly known as Money Order Economy. As the population of the area increased, there was enough pressure on the land, and there was no way out in relieving this additional pressure. Ultimately the people especially the menfolk started migrating to plains. As they were not educated to get into white collar jobs they had the only alternative to take to menial jobs, like in hotels or as maid servants. With this job and whatever

they could save - they sent to their families. Their womenflok are mainly responsible for looking after the field as well as family. Men come home during agricultural season for a short time to help the family. Thus the whole economy at present depends on the money order coming from their men flok. Again when we visit the villages in the area mostly we meet old people, children and women flok. The men flok between the ages 16 - 49 are totally missing !

The major participants in Chipko come from women flok. Even the children from schools participate widely supporting their parents. As discussed earlier only the women are left with themselves to mend their own problems. It strikes one who sees the women carrying huge headloads and walking a long distance in search of drinking water. They are the one who suffer the most due to the cutting of trees, as the sources of water dry faster and the daily fuel requirements has to be brought from a long distance.

With a little bit of reflection and thinking of historical aspects one wonders whether it is totally dominated by women, eventually leading to womens movement. In fact this has shown to the other parts of the world including the so-called educated women that the illeterate village women are more powerful and can initiate & participate in a movement. One obvious matter which stands out is that ones they become conscious of their exploitation, no one can stand in their struggle ~~xxx~~ to remove exploitation. In addition that they are other sex, sincere, dedicated and do not loose heart easily.

However one wonders whether such an action is trying to change the basis of social relationship between men an women. Well, it may not go to this extent, but it is definitely a step towards arousing the conscience of women which in turn may spread to some more areas elsewhere in the country.

As the whole CHIPKO ANDOLAN is an outcome of Sarvodaya ~~activistsx~~ it has adopted Gandhian means of non-violence. They are totally dedicated to peacefull methods. Again they claim netruality with politics.

The workers were in perinnial contact with the village people discussing with them the impact of deforestation. The old

people in authority are always involved in such discussions. To organise such people at village level the workers are putting in efforts to set up Local Village Samities. Through these local Samities a core group is formed with the potential of opposing (cutting) felling of trees in their area and at later stages requesting external support from nearby area.

Chipko week is ~~celebrated~~ celebrated during which the workers march on foot to distant villages passing on the message of Chipko. The youth are driven into such campaign movements. Many times the high school and the primary school children give a wide support to the movement through singing songs, slogans etc.

Lobbying among politicians has totally failed because it ultimately defeats the purpose as contractors finance these politicians during elections. Further the workers effort to bring pressure through high government officials has succeeded very little. However the efforts of outsiders like academicians and journalists provide moral support.

Imperitively the class background of workers is predominately middleclass, with Sarvodaya background. Young people from JP's Chaitra Yuva Sangarsha Vahini support this movement to a great deal. Financially it totally depends on outside fund from friends and well wishers. At the time of actual movement the local village samitis collect donations for the expense. In fact the solidarity of the people is expressed in such ways as people contribute in 'roti' and grain towards workers expenses. All these leads to emotional inti-gration and feeling of oneness with whole movement.

The movement (calls) aims to extend a ban on felling a trees in such strategic areas (catchment areas) for coming 10 years. This as they say will provide as a insurance against the coming destructions in the form of landslides, floods or degradation of topsoil, and retention of water sources. No doubt that these are of prime importance in hilly areas. But an important factor that can not be ignored in terms of reality is that the people have to depend on alternative sources of income during agriculture off season. Mostly the work they get is construction of roads and in forest for felling trees. The other alternative is to migrate to other areas searching work. Though majority of forest labourers are from Nepal, the local people do need alternative income. These problems are the other side of coin. Thus what is really needed is a clearcut of planting more trees which will help to retain the fertility of soil,

can be used as fertilizers as well as fodder for animal. All these should be done with an eye on generating further employment opportunities for local people. This has a long term affect on the overall economy of hill areas.

The implications for future generations seems rather bleak unless some action is taken immediately as the development of the area is not necessarily cutting of trees, it is the whole economy which is based on forest, ~~which~~ is in jeopardy.

There needs to be an exposure to younger generation. A new leadership base has to spring from young activists. At present the movement has got international and national attention due to the charismatic leadership traits of Sri. Sunderlal Bahuguna.

The placement of students in such agency provides varied work experience. The workers are the main brain behind the movement. To understand the ideology, as to how it developed to this stage has to be understood clearly to know the undercurrents of the movement. There is an opportunity wherein the worker confronts with the basic problems of workers life condition and the sacrifice he has made for attaining a particular goal.

Experience gained through visiting villages is another kind of learning process. It was a practical lesson as how to deal with variety of cross sections of people in a situation. How to establish rapport, the communication process etc. The village meetings were common phenomenon and there was enough learning opportunity. The skills required in conducting village meetings, keen observation, retaining the initial enthusiasm of workers were some specific areas in learning process.

The scope is of wide range as people one is free to go into day to day problems of local people, like corruption in a co-operative society. As people became aware they started an agitation against the office bearers, this was a classic example of a conflicting situation between the people and an institution. There were various factors influencing the peoples decisions. Same way there was the case of implementation of governmental schemes, the inadequencies in their perception and the actual problems encountered at village level. In fact we could see how various developmental efforts from government sectors were working in a particular area.

With such a kind of experience there is certainly a greater impact on professional growth. Though it is a very short time, one gets an exposure which gives phillip to the whole thinking process and enhancing of professional social work skills. It's difficult to learn these skills in a institutional set up like schools of social work, or even in the literature which is totally borrowed from west. The skills we learn are of indigenus in nature fitted to a socio-cultural environment of our <sup>country and helps to</sup> analyse the rural power structure in empirical terms rather than through sociological analysis or theories.

There is definitely every possibility of involving professional social workers in such type of movement as this will provide an insight into an indigenus resource base, from which we can derive future theory and practice. Though the school has tried to adapt to the countrys need, still there is a greater impact of external influence. We should try to reduce this influence making it more comprehensive to serve the needs of our country. Even our teaching policy needs altermation. The students should be allowed for more practical learning and questioning role rather than passive receipents of knowledge. ~~it seems that the admission policy itself is~~ at fault as we recruit new graduates without any kind of exposure to the problems confronted in every day life, leave along the experience of poverty and exploitation.

Chipko Andolan is definitely an ecological movement but it is in consonance with the overall development of the area. It provides a basis for a policy decision for national development. Although there is a claim for including the aspects in policies, it is never being done because of obvious reasons of political lobbying. The trees are felled every day in the name ~~xxx~~ of need for development of industries etc. necessary for the country.

In conclusion, it is a very complex issue to decide between development without distruction. Chipko Andolan shows a way out ~~xxxxxx~~ but one has to percive the whole situation in light of Gandhian ideas and values, which are the basis behind this movement. It looks like a totally "vegitarian programme" (affecting all classes in the society) with a blen of economics of the regions. The more important issues it has brought forth in forefront is the organisation of a popular movement and how to attract the support of

of masses. This is in itself totally a whole range of subject matter, which I hope will be given attention in coming days.

*(The article is based on actual field visit to Tehri-Garhwal in May-June 1979 as part of Block field work).*

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